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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

*Memorandum*



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1400  
25 March 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
FURTHER DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION  
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25 March 1965

HIGHLIGHTS

The Chinese Communist propaganda response to the open Viet Cong call for foreign military assistance was immediate, strong, and positive. Peiping said it would send war materiel to the insurgents and that it was prepared to send its "own men," if they are requested. The Chinese apparently hope their initiative will deter Washington from dispatching additional US combat troops to South Vietnam. The Chinese are also continuing to talk very tough about negotiation prospects, and have virtually made prior US withdrawal from Vietnam a prerequisite.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

The military situation remains relatively quiet as operational activity of the Viet Cong and government forces continues at a reduced level. Communist activity in Thua Thien Province has recently increased (Paras. 1 and 2). The government has launched a large-scale operation in Binh Tuy Province, but no results are as yet available (Para. 3).

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

Premier Quat's reception in Hue was friendly, but notably lacking in enthusiasm from a gathering largely organized by students (Para. 1). Militant Catholic circles appear increasingly unhappy with alleged Buddhist influence in the Quat government, and a possible Catholic coup attempt cannot be ruled out (Paras. 2 and 3).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:

Photos of the Dong Hoi radar site show only moderate damage was done by the 24 March strike (Para. 1). It appears that the air strikes of early March were largely taken in stride by the North Vietnamese public, although civil defense measures continued (Paras. 4, 5, and 6).

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments:

There is still no confirmation of the Soviet assertion that aid is "already" on the way to the DRV.

(Para. 1).

however, Peiping is holding up a trainload of Soviet military equipment destined for North Vietnam (Paras. 1 and 2).

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V. Communist Political Developments: Peiping

has openly declared its intention to send war materiel to the Viet Cong, and has promised to send its men when the Vietnamese ask for them (Paras 1-3). The Chinese are also continuing their hard line on negotiations both in public and in private (Paras. 4 and 5). Soviet officials continue to express their concern over US strikes against North Vietnam and are again attempting to influence US policy (Para. 7).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Japanese officials

claim the US has lost considerable prestige at the United Nations as a result of the gas issue in Vietnam (Para. 1).

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I. MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The military situation in South Vietnam remains relatively quiet as operational activity of government forces and the Viet Cong continues at reduced levels.

2. Viet Cong activity noted in MACV's Military Report for 23 March totaled 60 incidents, 10 occurring in the reporting period. No attacks were listed; harassing actions, sabotage and mining incidents predominated. In I Corps area, one civilian was assassinated by the Viet Cong in Quang Tri Province. Delayed reporting tells of 15 incidents in Thua Thien Province since 15 March, one involving the coordinated harassment of five hamlets on 22 March. In Phu Bon Province in II Corps, the Viet Cong on 20 March destroyed a New Life Hamlet, burning 75 houses and kidnaping an unknown number of civilians. In IV Corps, the Viet Cong harassed a post and watchtower in Kien Giang Province and directed mortar fire on an ARVN bivouac area in Chuong Thien Province. In Go Cong Province, a Viet Cong mine collapsed a bridge.

3. Three battalion-size or larger government operations were initiated on 23 March and four terminated, leaving a total of 15 continuing. A large-scale search-and-destroy operation was initiated in Binh Tuy Province against three main-force Viet Cong battalions. The ARVN force was the equivalent of two regular regiments (i.e., six battalions plus supporting units), and included an airborne battalion. No results are yet available. Government small-unit operations rose somewhat over the previous day's total to 2,515. Only 12 contacts were made with the Viet Cong, all without significant results.

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## II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Ambassador Taylor has characterized the popular reception to Premier Quat's arrival in Hue two days ago as "friendly, but not enthusiastic." Local officials greeted Quat at the airport. He drew a fairly large crowd of school children, students, and organized labor groups for his motorcade, and exchanged speeches in a ceremony largely organized by student groups. A keynote speech by a student leader expressed willingness to support the government, but was somewhat militant in tone. It was marked more by opposition to various deposed military leaders like Khanh than by pro-Quat sentiment. The premier's own speech was uninterrupted by applause, attributable in part to Quat's reserved public manner.

2. Comments by [redacted] some northern refugee priests, have recently revealed growing unhappiness with the Quat government. These Catholics, most of them identified as militants, believe that Buddhist leaders are working on the government to eliminate Catholic influence from the cabinet and that the Buddhists are also developing an alliance with certain generals, particularly Air Vice Marshal Ky and I Corps commander Thi. [redacted]

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[redacted] Quat has, at least in the past, had contacts with the Communist Liberation Front.

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3. The remarks hint at possible demonstrations or coup attempts by the Catholic militants if they continue to be dissatisfied. [redacted]

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[redacted] leaders of the abortive 19 February coup, said to be hiding with a Catholic priest, are again "extremely active." Saigon Military Governor General Dong, however, states that there are new feelers from the February coup group for an amnesty under which they would go abroad.

4. [redacted] Quat [redacted] may allow martial law in Saigon to expire on 27 March. This action would do away with Dong's position as military governor. Quat allegedly described Dong as close to the Catholics, and something

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of a troublemaker because of his proclivity for spreading rumors.

5. The newly designated chief of the Joint General Staff, General Cao, is reportedly scheduled to visit Taiwan beginning today through 31 March, for additional study of the Chinese Nationalist Army's political warfare department. Saigon's Defense Ministry has recently approved a decree enabling further development of its own similar program. The Chinese Nationalists reportedly would like to send an additional 20 advisers to help extend South Vietnam's program to the divisional level.



III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Preliminary photoanalysis on the 24 March strike against the Dong Hoi radar site revealed only one support building burning. Clouds obscured part of the target in the photos, however. Sightings by the reconnaissance pilots indicate that most of the attack was directed against AAA positions east and west of the radar site and that considerable damage was inflicted on those positions.

2. Damage to the Vinh Linh radar site, attacked on 23 March, was apparently also light. Seven buildings were destroyed.

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4. [REDACTED]  
the DRV domestic response to the air strikes during the first half of March. They indicate that the public had pretty well taken these attacks in stride. No firm information is yet available on the impact of the sustained attacks mounted against the DRV from 19 through 24 March.

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5. According to a Canadian ICC representative in Hanoi, no mass meetings or demonstrations were organized in the capital following the early March strikes. Military and civil defense activities in and around Hanoi, however, continued to be evident and suggested a partial state of alert. Antiaircraft batteries were still springing up, and guns were frequently seen under tow. The Canadian official felt that the lack of public response to the early March strikes was probably due to a lack of government encouragement. He believes that the regime is probably concerned to reduce the impact of the strikes on normal economic effort in the DRV.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is as yet no evidence to confirm the assertion by Soviet leader Brezhnev on 23 March that the USSR "is already" assisting the DRV in building up its defense potential.

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2.

[redacted] the Chinese were interfering with Soviet aid shipments. In addition, French, Turkish, and German diplomats in Moscow have now passed on reports that Peiping is refusing transit facilities for Soviet air flights to Hanoi. These reports may represent Soviet efforts to embarrass the Chinese. If true, however, Peiping's action reflects the intensity of the Chinese desire to prevent Moscow from regaining any influence with Hanoi. Such actions would risk an open Soviet denunciation of Chinese obstruction of aid to another socialist state, and thus adversely affect Chinese-Vietnamese relations.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Chinese Communists have given prompt propaganda support to the Viet Cong's open call for foreign military assistance. The People's Daily editorial on 25 March is the most explicit warning thus far concerning possible Chinese military intervention.

2. People's Daily declared that the Chinese people will join in sending "all necessary material aid, including arms and all other war material, to the Viet Cong." The editorial took a more cautious line on the question of sending Chinese troops, however, by asserting that Peiping was ready for this step "whenever the South Vietnamese people want them." The Viet Cong statement implied that a call for such assistance would come only if the US continues to send its own forces to Vietnam and further "expands" the war.

3. Peiping's contingent pledge of manpower thus appears to be an effort to pressure Washington into halting the influx of US combat forces into Vietnam. Hanoi has rebroadcast the Viet Cong appeal, but has not yet commented independently on it.

4. According to press reports from Peiping on 24 March, a senior Chinese official told Japanese correspondents that negotiations were impossible as long as the US bombing attacks against the DRV continued and US troops remained in South Vietnam. This statement, if correctly quoted, goes beyond the more ambiguous Chinese position in earlier comments that "peace" in Vietnam is out of the question prior to a US withdrawal.

5. The harder public line taken by Peiping has also appeared in private Chinese statements. During a long meeting with the French ambassador in Peiping on 17 March Premier Chou En-lai was reported to have said that US air strikes must stop and an agreement must be reached for the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam before any negotiations

for a settlement could begin. When pressed on the need for a conference, Chou said that if it came to talks the Cambodian question would be the easiest place to begin. After this was settled Laos might be taken up, he said, and finally Vietnam.

6. The bloc tirade against the use of "gas" in South Vietnam continued today with Moscow and Peiping giving the theme extensive play. In Hanoi, various Communist front organizations, such as the Vietnam Red Cross Society, the Vietnam Health Trade Union, and the Vietnam General Association of Medical Science, issued statements condemning the use of "poison gases" by the US to "massacre" the South Vietnamese people. The statements called on the members of comparable organizations throughout the world to protest and to demand an immediate end to such "barbarous acts."

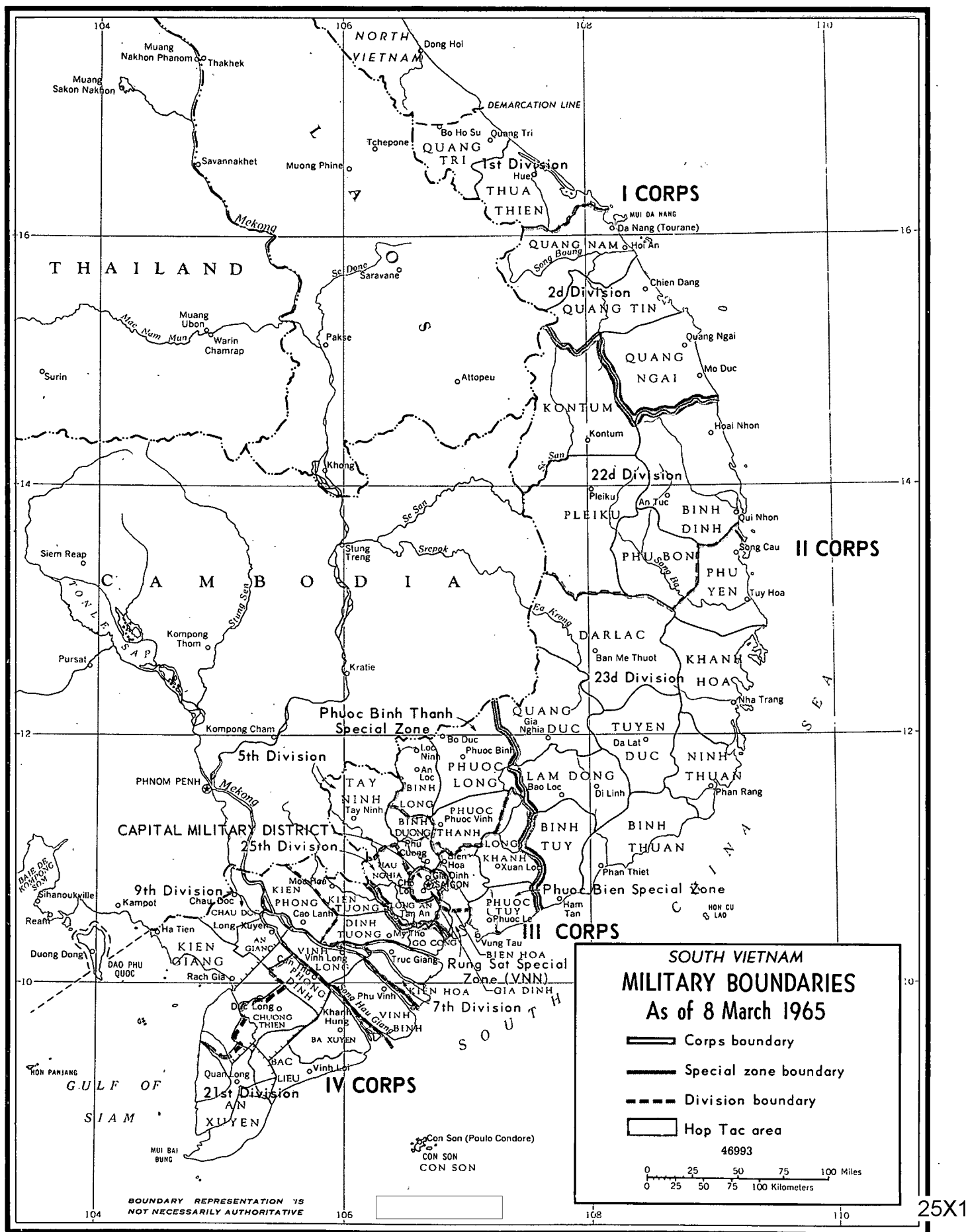
7. In a talk with the British chargé at a Moscow reception on 23 March, a senior Soviet Foreign Ministry official expressed his concern over the escalation of Vietnamese hostilities and asserted that a "cease-fire" was essential. He was skeptical of how such a cease-fire could be worked out and questioned the usefulness of any kind of talks under "existing conditions." Foreign Minister Gromyko told the French ambassador at the same reception that a "political conclusion" to the crisis had become "more difficult" in view of US action.

VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Japanese officials at the UN have told the US that the "gas issue" has produced a "very harsh, emotional" criticism of the US among Asian delegates at the UN. The Japanese maintained that the US had made substantial progress during the past month in convincing Afro-Asians that the Viet Cong depended upon Hanoi for its aid and direction and that consequently US strikes against North Vietnam were necessary. They flatly stated, however, that the emotional reaction stemming from reports on the "gas" question has "virtually cancelled" this progress. Similar reports indicating harsh criticism have been reported in the UN from Swedish, Danish, and Irish delegates.

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